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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to improve the literacy skills of at-risk children enrolled at Frayser Elementary School in Memphis (Tennessee) by involving parents in school activities at home and at school. Parents were invited to participate in a series of workshops on tips for reading with children and were encouraged to use these skills in the home setting and as volunteers in their children's classrooms. The project was designed to accomplish the following objectives: (1) improve the literacy skills of K-6 at-risk students by training their parents to provide literacy skills instruction at home and at school; (2) increase the involvement of parents as volunteers in classrooms and in other school related activities; and (3) use technology to improve the writing skills of at-risk sixth grade students. While 61 parents signed up to participate in the literacy program, only 17 actually attended. After some initial anxiety, the teachers felt more confident and comfortable with their role following the training sessions and the initial workshop for parents. Teacher evaluations of the workshop indicated that the workshops were needed, well conducted, and helpful. All of the parents completing evaluation forms found the workshops relevant, helpful, and enjoyable. Two training sessions were conducted for the sixth-grade teachers and a one-day workshop in computer skills was held for the sixth-grade students at the University of Memphis. Significant learnings are summarized under the following headings: students, lessons learned, most significant aspects about the project, things to do differently, advice for others planning projects, students' needs, effect on practices as an educator, and relationships with other educators. (ND)

ED 386 448

FINAL REPORT ON STUDENT SUCCESS PROGRAM AT FRAYSER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 1994-95

IMPROVING THE LITERACY SKILLS OF K-6 AT-RISK STUDENTS THROUGH PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

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College of Education
Instruction and Curriculum Leadership Department

The University of Memphis

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FINAL REPORT ON STUDENT SUCCESS PROGRAM:

IMPROVING THE LITERACY SKILLS OF K-6 AT-RISK STUDENTS THROUGH PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

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DATE:

July 26, 1995

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I. Overview of Project

The purpose of this project was to improve the literacy skills of at-risk children enrolled at Frayser Elementary schools by involving parents in school activities at home and at school. Parents were invited to participate in a series of workshops on tips for reading with children and were encouraged to use these skills in the home setting and as volunteers in their children's classrooms. The major components of the project were:

A. Training classroom teachers to conduct workshop sessions for parents

B. Conducting training sessions for parents

C. Inviting parents to volunteer in classrooms

D. Training sixth grade teachers to use computers and computer software to develop newsletters and poetry book to distribute to parents and selected community agencies

E. Training sixth graders to develop newsletters and poetry book using computer skills taught by their teachers

F. Conducting evaluation of program

II. Objectives and Activities

This project was designed to accomplish the following objectives:

Objective 1: Improve the literacy skills of K-6 at-risk students by training their parents to provide literacy skills instruction at home and at school.

Activities. Seven classroom teachers (one from each grade level) plus the Chapter 1 facilitator for the school, site coordinator for this project, were trained in two workshop sessions to conduct literacy training for parents. The sessions were conducted by Dr. Marty Harrison, a reading and language arts specialist at The

University of Memphis. Books and games, purchased with program funds for parents to check out to use at home, were introduced in the sessions for the teachers.

The Family Literacy Program was introduced to the parents at an open house held on Tuesday, September 27, 1994 (see open house program in exhibits section of this report). Sign-up sheets were distributed to all parents present to complete, if they were interested. The next day, sign-up sheets were sent home by the children to all families at the school (see copy of sign-up sheet in exhibits section).

Three consecutive workshops were conducted by the teachers for parents who attended the workshops scheduled for: Thursdays from 10 a.m. -12 noon for one group of parents and on Tuesdays from 5:00 -7:00 p.m. for the second group of parents. Workshops sessions included the rationale for reading to children, modeling, practice and feedback from parents. At each session, parents were able to check out books and games from the resource center to use with their children at home. During the last morning session, parents were invited to read to children in classrooms. One parent volunteered to accept the challenge.

During the spring semester, the faculty had considered offering a third group of workshop sessions for parents of children in grades two and three, but did not so because of other pressing responsibilities that included: (a) planning and conducting Chapter 1 parent workshops required by the school district, and (b) preparing students for taking the state standardized achievement tests, the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP). However, parents who attended the fall sessions continued to volunteer at school and to check out books and games from the Teacher Parent Action Center. This center was established with funds from this grant and a $5,000 collaboration grant from The International Paper Foundation.

Future planned activities.The school is also considering implementing a family math project in the future. The co-liaison who works with me at Frayser Elementary as

a part of the Professional Development Schools program conducted the initial training for the teachers on Tuesday, January 17, 1995. A training format similar to the one used for the reading sessions was implemented--increasing the capacity of the regular classroom teachers to involve parents in the education of their children. The faculty decided to implement the family math project during the 1995-96 academic year and to implement additional reading workshops for parents as well.

Significant changes from original proposal. The original plan was to conduct workshop sessions for one group of parents during the evening over a six weeks period. The decision was made by program staff and school administration to offer a session during the morning and evening over a three-week period rather than six-weeks. In addition, door prizes (books and games to enhance literacy skills of children), child care services and refreshments were provided at each session to encourage the attendance of more parents and family members. While child care services were made available, parents did not request or use this service during the workshop sessions.

Objective 2: Increase the involvement of parents as volunteers in classrooms and in other school related activities.

Activities. Parents in attendance at the workshop sessions were invited to classrooms to read to individual children, small groups and large groups as well as volunteer to work in the newly established health center and the Teacher Parent Action Center (TPAC). The site coordinator reported that parents were involved in the ways noted below following the workshop sessions and after repeated invitations by the school faculty and staff. Parents: (a) read to classes, (b) tutored students in grades 2 and 3 in reading and mathematics, (c) asked to take home projects to use to extend reading skills, (d) checked out books from the TPAC, (e) used the TPAC to tutor students in order to improve reading skills and standardized reading scores, (f) read to

students who were ill and had to be removed from the classroom in the TPAC and the health center, (g) helped to check out materials from the TPAC, (h) called parents whose children needed special help in reading, (i) served as a support group for each other, (j) took on leadership positions in the PTO, (k) extended skills by attending Chapter 1 workshops, (l) set up parent programs to motivate other parents to use the TCAP, (m) worked more closely with principal, teachers, and facilitators, (n) communicated that they felt more secure about interacting with teachers and principal, (o) had more one-to-one contact with teachers and principal, (p) volunteered for more school activities, i.e., field trips and school programs, and (q) communicated a desire to be a part of the site-based management system that will be implemented during the 1995-96 academic year.

Future planned activities. Classroom teachers and school administrators will continue to invite parents to volunteer in classrooms and in other areas of the school.

Significant changes from the original proposal. The establishment of a Teacher Parent Action Center was not a part of the original proposal and serve as the site for the center of contact for parents who participated in school activities. The new health center was set up directly across the hall from the TPAC which gave parents easy access to resources when caring for ill children until they were picked up by their parents. This center was a valuable enhancement for the home-school partnership.

Objective 3. Use technology to improve the writing skills of at-risk sixth grade students.

Activities. Two training sessions were conducted on site by Dr. Katherine Abraham, computer specialist at the University of Memphis, for the two sixth grade teachers and the site coordinator for the project. They received training in using the Macintosh computer and The Writing Center, a software package that can be used for developing a newsletter. Substitutes were hired s hat the teachers could use the

entire two days for training and practice time to get ready for training their students.

On February 3, 1995, both 6th grade classes were invited to complete a one day computer skills workshop at The University of Memphis. The field trip to the university campus included a 2 1/2 computer skills workshop, a welcome by an assistant dean of the College of Education, and lunch in one of the university cafeterias with university students from selected fraternities and sororities.

Prior to attending the computer workshop, students were asked to bring an essay they had written that could be included in the school newsletter (see exhibits section for details). Each student was able to process her/his essay into a newsletter format by the end of the workshop session. This was a major motivater in getting students ready to complete the school newsletter. The session was conducted by Dr. Katherine Abraham and the Project SMART (Science and Mathematics Advancement Radically Raised) staff. Frayser Elementary School is a partner in that project.

Students completed one school newsletter during the second semester that was distributed to all parents (see exhibits section for copy of newsletter). They did not complete the second newsletter or the poetry book as planned.

Future planned activities. During the spring semester, a 4th grade faculty member wrote a grant to establish 21st Century classrooms in all the intermediate grades, effective at the beginning of the 1995-96 academic year. This means that all intermediate teachers will have 5 computers in their classrooms to use as tools in enhancing literacy across all subject areas. These teachers will receive training provided by the school system. In addition, funds from Project SMART were used to equip one 4th grade classroom this spring and 3 Frayser teachers participated in a 4-week training program at the university which included a 4-day summer camp for children from Frayser and 5 other Professional Development Schools. Project SMART funds will provide computer workshops for all teachers at the school during

the next 3 academic years. Each teacher is scheduled to receive 8 inservice days of training each year. The site coordinator for this project participated in a month-long urban writing institute this summer, which included using computers as a writing tool. She plans to work with small groups of 6th graders this fall to enhance their writing skills.

Significant changes from the original proposal. The field trip to the university to participate in a computer skills workshop was not a part of the original proposal. However, it appeared to be a major motivater in getting students started on the school newsletter. The 6th graders completed one newsletter instead of two newsletters and a poetry book that were a part of the original plan.

On-site Visit by NFIE Representatives

Carol Edwards and Robert Gannon visited Frayser Elementary on Thursday, February 16, 1995 (see details of activities included in the exhibits section). In addition to visiting classrooms to see the students at work, NFIE representatives had lunch with parents and school administrators and met with teachers that received training and provided training for parents. During this visit, one of the local TV stations taped one of the parents trained in this project reading to a first grade class. This segment was shown on the evening news along with the interview with Carol Edwards.

As requested by NFIE representatives, an after school meeting was held with faculty, key representatives from other PDSs, and university liaisons to gather input on PDSs and to provide information on NFIE grant programs. Refreshments were provided by Frayser Elementary School.

III. Outcomes/Evaluation

Outcomes

Training for teachers. The classroom teachers were anxious about their roles

in training the parents. This was a new role for many of the teachers. However, following the training sessions and the initial workshop for parents, the teachers felt more confident and comfortable with their role. The teachers who received the computer training indicated that they were ready to begin their work with the students. Teachers were extremely pleased with the new books and games that could be used with the children both at home and at school.

Workshops for Parents. Sixty-one parents signed up to participate in the literacy program, 17 parents actually attended the sessions. One of the parents came on a regular basis to read in the classroom. Seven of the parents continued to check out books to use with their children at home. Five parents volunteered to work in the new health room. Parents who visit the health room also take a look at the books and games in the TPAC. Three parents called the site coordinator to get names of some books and games in the resource room in order to purchase the same for their children for Christmas presents. The site coordinator reported on her observations regarding the workshop sessions for parents:

> After parents had one session of training, they were energized about reading with students (their child).
>
> It was a support group for parents. They began exchanging phone numbers, discussing ideas gained, and suggesting ways they could implement the program at home.
>
> Parents were excited about the books at the sessions. They discussed the pictures and stories.
>
> Parents gradually became confident where they could go to classrooms and read to larger groups.
>
> Several parents did not wait for the sessions to end. They asked if the workshop could be extended.
>
> One parent mentioned that this was informative and made her feel more comfortable with teachers because of the one-on-one relationship she had with teachers (during the workshop sessions).

Evaluation

Teacher Evaluation of Workshops. Teachers completed evaluation forms for the training sessions provided for them by the specialists from the university. A copy of the form completed by teachers and parents is included in the exhibits section. Three teachers completed evaluations in each of the two sessions which resulted in a total of 6 feedback surveys. From the analysis of the surveys regarding the computer training sessions, we found 3 themes : (1) the goals and objectives of the workshops were well communicated, (2) the workshops were helpful, and (3) there is a need for such workshops. The teachers had a remarkable consensus that the workshop leader had knowledge of the material and considered the workshop content to be relevant to their needs. One teacher wrote, "The presenter was able to present the workshop so that I (a beginner) was able to grasp the concept/practiced real well."

Some teachers voiced their opinions that there is a need for the workshops to continue. One teacher noted, "Longer time of period with the instructor to cover more in depth procedure/problems." Another stated that, "Would like to take this as a course."

Parent Evaluation of Workshops. Parent evaluation forms were completed at the end of each workshop session and feedback has been very positive. A total of seventeen different parents attend one to three workshop sessions and completed 28 workshop evaluation forms during the months of October and November 1994. Of the 28 responses, 28 believed that the workshops communicated the goals and objectives well, and rated it with the highest score of 5. Twenty-five responses noted that the presentations addressed the topics well and the majority felt that workshop leaders had knowledge of the materials and that the goals and objectives of the sessions were met. All of the parents felt that the workshop content was relevant for them.

Suggestions and other comments were given by 14 respondents. Many of the

parents reported that the workshops were helpful to them because they now know how to get their children to become interested in reading. For example, one parent reported, "Really show me some good ways to get my son more interested in reading." Another parent noted, "Since this program my smaller children and I are reading more and we are really enjoying it." As one parent asserted, "I think this program is a great idea, it helps parents so they can help their children." One parent noted that closer contact with the instructor was enjoyable and helpful in saying, "I really enjoyed the one-to-one session with the instructor. We had small groups and it was helpful." Another parent asserted his or her desire for more workshops for family literacy by saying, "Hopefully this could be repeated this spring." All of the adults attending the workshop sessions considered the workshops to be relevant to their needs, helpful, and enjoyable.

Parent and Teacher Questionnaires. A Parent/Guardian Questionnaire related to parental involvement at Frayser Elementary was mailed to 100 parents, who were randomly selected, prior to the beginning of the workshop sessions. After two mailings and follow-up telephone calls, 22 questionnaires were completed and returned. Fifteen of the 30 teachers at Frayser completed questionnaires related to parental involvement activities at the school. Because of the poor initial returns and the financial costs involved we decided not to send out a post-questionnaire and thus we do not have data from this questionnaire or the teachers' questionnaire that reflect the treatment provided by this project. Copies of both the Parent Questionnaire and the Teacher Questionnaire are included with this report. However, data collected will be useful in providing information on parent and teacher efficacy and their perceptions about parental involvement at Frayser. The completed research report will present a profile of parent involvement that will be helpful as the school staff and parents work together to improve parental involvement in school activities.

The research effort was sponsored by the Barbara K. Lipman Research Institute and the Faculty Research Grant Program at The University of Memphis. The research report for Frayser and the 8 other PDSs will be completed by September 1, 1995. A report will be made available to the faculty of each school and oral presentations will be made to the faculty by members of the research team, if requested.

Principal Interview. The school principal was interviewed near the close of the school year to gain additional background information on the parent involvement program at Frayser Elementary. The interviewer solicited information on : (a) the director's degree of satisfaction with the work of the parent organization, (b) degree of satisfaction with the efforts of teachers to involve parents in the life of the school, (c) special efforts teachers made to encourage parents to participate in school activities, and (d) ways parents were involved in activities of the school during the 1994-95 academic year.

The principal indicated that she was satisfied with the work of the PTO this year because "they are very cooperative, worked well with principal [but] need increase parent involvement." She also indicated that she was satisfied with the efforts of the teachers to involve parents in the life of the school and noted that: "I'm satisfied about teachers efforts but feel that we need additional strategies to increase attendance of parents." The principal indicated that teachers had participated in the following efforts to encourage parents to participate in school activities: (a) phone calls, (b) newsletters to homes (some), (c) special notes to individual families (kindergarten and grade 6), (d) refreshments at meetings, (e) child care at meeting site (limited), (g) door prizes, and (h) program involving children. Teachers encouraged parents to: use the Parent Resource room, chaperone field trips, attend school parties and programs, and observe children in classrooms.

The principal reported that parents had been involved in the following activities

this past year: (a) parent conferences, (b) volunteers in the classrooms (minimum), (c) phone conversations with teachers, (d) open house programs, (e) parent workshops or lectures, (f) fundraisers, (g) helping with homework, and (h) other activities to include May Day, programs and field trips.

IV. Significant Learnings

Students. The most significant learning for the students was the acquisition of computer skills that facilitated the development of a school newsletter. Some parents also reported the added joy in reading with children at home after participating in the literacy workshop sessions. Continued use and development of these skills can only enhance the long-term achievement of the students.

Lessons learned. Many parents are willing to be involved in programs for their children if the school is willing to reach out to them to plan good programs that are important to them and their children. Parents are also willing to acquire new skills that will help them to help their children to be successful in school. Teachers must not give up when parent participation is low. When participation has been poor, it takes time, persistence, adequate support services, and good quality programs to build trust and good will.

Most significant about project. The most significant aspect of this project was that it assisted in building the capacity of classroom teachers to interact in positive ways with parents to provide skills that will enable children to succeed in school.

Things to do differently. In addition to sending reminders home prior to each workshop session, I would also request that each classroom teacher give a reminder call to the parents of children enrolled in her/his class prior to each session.

Advice for others planning projects. Begin projects early in the school year when parents are anxious to get their children off to a good start and children are excited about new beginnings.

Students' needs. The need to improve the literacy skills of the students at Frayser is a long-term goal that will require the cooperation of parents and teachers. We think we have opened a small window of hope for this partnership with this project. The need for sixth grade students to begin to use technology as a tool for enhancing their writing skills was met and proved to be an important confidence builder for the students, teachers and parents. The 6th grade students also talked for many weeks about their field trip to the university campus. The experience that they appeared to enjoy the most during the field trip was "eating in the university cafeteria." They are anxiously looking forward to other visits to the campus.

Effect on practices as an educator. Since I am a teacher educator who prepares prospective teachers to work with parents, I am able to share with students an on-going project that models the theory and practice that we discuss in class. The practice of having a mentor for the project director was a real asset for me. It provided many opportunities to get advice from someone who understood the problems and successes I was dealing with because she had already conducted a successful NFIE project. This experience reinforced the importance of mentoring in the teacher education process.

Relationships with other educators. The teachers that received the literacy and computer training are charged with sharing their new skills with other teachers in their building. Key educators from other PDSs were invited for an informational session on the Student Success Program at Frayser and other NFIE grant programs when the on-site visit was made NFIE representatives.

V. Budget

With consultation and approval of my mentor, Gloria Berrigan, the budget was revised several times based on the changing needs of the project at Frayser. The major change was the need for fewer dollars for substitute pay to release teachers for training and conducting workshops for parents. Some of the costs were paid by the school district. The money left in this category was used to purchase additional books, games, and program supplies.

Budget Summary

		Original	Expended
A.	Salaries	$ 0	$ 0
	Project Director, V.Morris*	0	0
	Site Coordinator, E.Branch**	0	0
	Evaluator, S. Taylor*	0	0
	Computer Specialist, K. Abraham*	0	0
	Literacy Trainer, M. Harrison*	0	0
B.	Travel	1,000	1,000
C.	Supplies (Books and Games Office/program supplies)	1,620	2,844
D.	Services (substitute pay)	1,380	156
E.	Total Costs	$4,000	$4,000

* Morris, Taylor, Abraham, and Harrison are professors at The University of Memphis who donated their time to this project as in-kind contributions.

**Branch is the Chapter 1 Facilitator at Frayser Elementary who donated her time as an in-kind contribution.

VI. Collaboration

Workshop leaders. The training in literacy and use of computers was provided at no cost to the project by university professors who are specialists in their areas. They are also university liaisons in other PDSs served by The University of Memphis.

Project SMART and Urban Writing Institute. The site coordinator and three other teachers received additional training in the use of computers to improve writing, science, and mathematics instruction at Frayser. Project SMART and the Urban Writing Institute provided new tools and skills for teachers to improve literacy skills across the curriculum. Both projects were conducted at The University of Memphis.

Project evaluation. All the resources needed to complete the evaluation portion of the project were supported by grants awarded by the Barbara K. Lipman Research Institute and the Faculty Research Grant program. Both awards are part of The University of Memphis' efforts to promote faculty research. These grants, totaling $9,000, provided graduate assistants, supplies, postage and other resources to document parents' and teachers' perceptions about parental involvement activities at Frayser Elementary and 8 other Professional Development Schools that are affiliated with The University of Memphis.

Other materials and resources. The University was awarded a grant from the International Paper Foundation that provided an additional $5,000 for books, field trips and consumable supplies for each classroom. These are resources that teachers requested in order to improve the instructional program for children in their classrooms and included materials that were placed in the Teacher Parent Action Center for parents to check out to use at home with their children.

VII. The Future

The faculty plans to continue to offer workshops for parents in reading and mathematics and to encourage parents to volunteer to work in various posts in the

school. Many more parents must be reached in order to meet the long-term achievement goals of the school. We plan to develop a handbook that outlines our successes with the literacy project that can be used by other faculty in the building and classroom teachers in other schools.

VIII. Exhibits (not included for ERIC document)

Exhibits include:

1. Open house program
2. Program sign-up sheet
3. Letters sent to parents
4. Training plan for teachers
5. Workshop feedback form
6. News releases
7. Field Trip to University Campus
8. Site Visit Agenda
9. Budget Revisions
10. Student Newsletter
11. PDS Newsletter (Frayser Project featured on p.3)
12. Teacher Questionnaire
13. Parent/Guardian Questionnaire

IX. Observations, Judgments and Opinions

We were very pleased to know that 61 parents were interested enough in the project to sign up to participate in the workshops. We were also pleased that 17 parents did attend the sessions and appeared to be committed to using the new information to help their children succeed in school.

The participating teachers appeared to have a new confidence in their ability to reach parents and will continue to try to involve other parents who were unable to

attend the workshop sessions. Teachers were also very encouraged by the new resources made available through the project and the collaborating projects--resources they selected to meet the needs of children in their classrooms. These materials serve as the core for the establishment of the new Teacher Parent Action Center at the school. This resource center has become the focal site in the school for parent involvement activities--an unintended benefit of this project.

Our biggest disappointment was the number of parents that attended the workshop sessions relative to the number that actually signed up. However, we were committed as a faculty to serve well, few parents or many parents--whatever number showed up. All evidence point to increased parental involvement at Frayser Elementary this year. However, the participation remains small relative to the need.